

## Book Reviews

**Our ice is vanishing = sikuvut nunguliqtuq. A history of Inuit, newcomers and climate change.** Shelley Wright. 2014. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press. 398p, illustrated, hardcover. ISBN 978-0-7735-4462-8. CAN \$27.97.

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The Inuit are 'silaup aalaruqpalianigata tusaqtittijit - witnesses and messengers of climate change' (page 1), and 'sikuvut nunguliqtuq' (our ice is vanishing) (page 19) brings profound changes to their lives in terms of their natural environment and opening of the Arctic to the greater interaction with the outside world. Were it not for the Inuktitut terms in this earlier sentence, the statement about rapid Arctic change resulting from interacting forces of climate change and globalisation would not catch much attention of a reader even moderately familiar with the most recent literature on the region. What distinguishes, however, to some extent *Our ice is vanishing*... from other titles is the attempt of its author to put questions of climate change, Arctic sovereignty, and economic development into the deeper context of human history of the Arctic, in particular Nunavut and Greenland, and Inuit life.

The book is organized into ten chapters, followed by three declarations provided for in the appendices: *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic*, *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Resource Development Principles in Inuit Nunaat* and *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in relation to the undertaken theme of sovereignty. Whereas the first chapter, *Sikuvut: Our ice*, sets the stage for the volume and introduces the reader to the author and her personal motivation in writing the book, the following ones develop to large degree chronologically, from the origins and history of the Inuit in chapter 2 (*Iglulik: The place where there is a house*), through the history of European and Inuit exploration of the Arctic in chapters 3 and 4 (*The Northwest Passage and Inuit odysseys*) to discussion of complex relationship between Canadian and Inuit sovereignty in chapter 5 (*Canada's Arctic dominion*). In chapter 6 the book continues with a recollection (*Human flagpoles*) of one of the darkest episodes in recent Arctic history, namely the relocations of Inuit families and the removal of children to residential schools (which was brought into limelight again in 2015 when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada concluded its 7-year work calling for redressing the legacy of residential schools and advancing the process of Canadian reconciliation) and looks at creation of Nunavut in chapter 7 (*Nunavut: Our land*). Three last chapters in the volume (*Silaup aulaninga: Climate change; Is the Arctic safe for polar bears?*; and *Tusaqtittijit: messengers*) come back to the theme of climate change and seek to provide to it both indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives.

Shelley Wright is Canadian and a professor of Aboriginal Studies at Langara College. Her own experience in the Arctic began in 2001, when after a long career in teaching law in Australia, Singapore and New Zealand she moved back to Canada and accepted the offer of becoming the northern

director in the Akitsiraq Law School being established in Iqaluit, Nunavut. The school has been an experiment in higher education for indigenous students and designed to provide a full bachelor of law program for a small group of Inuit undergraduates in the territory of Nunavut. It was in the position of its director that the author learnt about what, as she writes, 'is completely foreign to most of my fellow Canadian citizens' (page 21). Wright recalls her father who, as a young radio officer, travelled briefly in the Arctic in times when parts of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) line were built in Frobisher Bay, Thule in Greenland and in the Resolute Bay, among others. In contrast to him, who remained detached and largely unaware of oftentimes disastrous conditions of life of Inuit in the second half of the twentieth century, Wright's stay and experience of living in Nunavut made her acquainted with and sensitive to many of contemporary issues troubling northern communities. Overall, the book in many parts reads like her tribute to the Inuit people – to their wisdom, perseverance and resilience shown throughout the history of their survival in the harsh natural environment as well as many times graver in consequences encounters with European settlers and interactions with governance structures of Canada.

To this end the author uses a variety of sources including traditional, spiritual and scientific; historical and current; visual, oral and written materials. She draws as well from her personal experience as well as from the stories and anecdotes learnt directly from both Inuit and non-Inuit northerners. She moves between the two worlds - the North and the South - writing about the dominating perception of the Arctic pristine wilderness among 'those of use who live almost exclusively in cities' (page 7) and for whom 'Nature is foreign' (page 9) and seeking to feed it with far more complex, confronting and challenging realities of life in the Arctic. It is the goal that Wright sets for herself with this volume: 'attempt to open a door to the Arctic in the hope of providing some insight to the lives of Inuit, the impact of climate change, and the demands that Canada has made and is still making on both the people and the environment of the North' (page 21–22).

Whereas the author succeeds in this endeavor in the earlier, more historical chapters in the book – and many times does it with a beautiful and very engaging language – the later sections, in particular those dedicated to climate change, to this reviewer may be to some extent missing this point. In her account of *silaup aulaninga* (climate change) the author attempts to explain the phenomenon of climate change and bases this part on numerous scientific sources. She also goes back thousands years to offer a reader a much longer perspective of currently observed changes and combines it with insights about Inuit knowledge of climate change as well as harmful effects of global warming on indigenous populations of the north and other parts of the planet. The major reservation that this reviewer has relates, however, to the representation of science in this volume. While the author recalls extensively sources like *Arctic Climate Impact Assessment*, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and takes the challenge of getting the facts right behind the oftentimes misleading, or even entirely

faulty, coverage of climate change in the media, simultaneously she writes about ‘meteorologists, who are not generally experts in anything beyond daily weather forecasting’ (page 226) and misses references to the facts and arguments presented in the section, e.g. ‘where smog over Beijing contributes to smog over Los Angeles’ (page 229) or ‘an amazingly precise body of knowledge about previous changes to global climate’ (page 200).

Furthermore, in the introductory chapter she juxtaposes science with traditional wisdom when writing: ‘We have forgotten the language of Mother Earth and the beautiful terrifying magic that is part of her and our reality. Now we call it science and think we can control it’ (page 12). In this reviewer’s view such opinions may not be particularly helpful in making people more aware of the threatening reality of climate change and in efforts to bridge indigenous knowledge and scientific research to jointly offer responses to the consequences of human-induced climate change. Finally, they may not be especially useful in appeasing extremely politicised wrangles over climate change, where science is often misused as a proxy for what are primarily debates over fundamental values.

Nevertheless, even if some readers do not find themselves entirely at ease with the way Wright writes about the science, this

point certainly should not overshadow the overall value of the book. *Our ice is vanishing* can be highly commended to the broad audience not well familiar with the realities and inherent complexities of life mostly in the Canadian Arctic, both historical and the ones of today. Wright takes her readers for a long and often fascinating journey through the centuries of life in the North. She neither hides her admiration for the resilience and perseverance of the Inuit people nor passion for making and defending their case. Seeing the generally low level of understanding of the North in the South of Canada (cf. Gordon Foundation 2015), such voices are certainly very much needed and Wright’s volume represents a great addition to the growing body of literature on those matters (Malgorzata (Gosia) Smieszek, Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, PO Box 122, 96101 Rovaniemi, Finland ([malgorzata@smieszek@ulapland.fi](mailto:malgorzata@smieszek@ulapland.fi))).

### Reference

Gordon Foundation. 2015. Toronto: Gordon Foundation. URL: <http://gordonfoundation.ca/publication/789> (accessed 12 July 2016).

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**Dispatches from continent seven. An anthology of Antarctic science.** Rebecca Priestley. 2016. Wellington: Awa Press. xxxiii + 422p, illustrated, softcover. ISBN 978-1-927249055. NZ \$55.

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Reviewing anthologies will always be difficult. Everyone can come up with their own selection of pieces in any field in which they are expert so why is this particular selection better or worse than one I might have compiled? In fact this anthology has several very positive features. The first thing to say is that Rebecca Priestley had the idea and did something about it. There are plenty of anthologies of heroic narratives but this is the first I have come across that aims to focus on science rather than exploring and adventure. The second positive feature is that she persuaded the publisher to allow her enough pages to make the extracts valuable, allowing the style and voice of the writer to come through. And the third is her flexible approach using not only the original books but also blogs, popular science articles and poems, as well as commissioning a few articles on topics she felt needed to be included.

She has assembled the 48 prose extracts and the poems (from six poets) into four sections – *Unknown land*, *The first Antarticans*, *Continent for science* and *Global barometer* – each with a short introduction in bold type. She also contributed a 10 page introduction to the volume explaining its origins and her own experience of being in Antarctica as a writer with the New Zealand national programme. There are some small errors I noted, especially on page xxv where she intimates that there were no stations in Antarctica before IGY when of course the British, Argentine, Chilean, French and Australian had already been established. She also says that the Antarctic Treaty was signed in 1961 when it was actually signed in 1959 and ratified in 1961. Whilst Bellinghousen is referred to as a German he was born to what are known as Baltic Germans in what is now

Estonia and then was Russian, and De Gerlache was suffering from depression as well as scurvy which undermined his control of *Belgica*. But these are minor comments given the high quality of the proof reading for the many transcribed extracts in the volume.

Many of the pieces will be familiar to readers of *Polar Record* as they come from the classic accounts but even they may not immediately recognise the selections from the expeditions of Scott and Shackleton where the extracts are from the science appendices rather than the main text. But even for this well-read audience there will be things they have missed like Rhian Salmon on her days at Halley, Graham Turbot on seals, Robin Bell on the Gamburtsev Mountains and Kathryn Smith on the invasion of the King Crabs to name just some. The compiler has tried to choose a range of topics – meteorites, katabatic winds, penguins, seals, geology, icebergs, ozone hole, meteorology, balloon ascent, etc – to give a broad feel for science and in that respect I think that her inclusion of some of the exploration narratives like James Cook, Frederick Cook, Leopold McClintock, and even Joseph Dubouzet does not help the focus. If these early expeditions needed to be included then we should be hearing from the scientists/naturalists about science and not the expedition leaders.

If it were my selection then I would have included pieces from Mawson whose enthusiasm for Antarctic geology was palpable, from Charcot’s scientists looking for insects and mosses on the Antarctic Peninsula, and perhaps from Tom Bagshawe whose expedition achieved the first detailed life cycle of the Gentoo penguin whilst living under an upturned boat. Instead of Cook I would have included something more scientific from his naturalists, the Forsters. And whilst we have Rob Dunbar’s blog on drilling from *Joindes Resolution* there is nothing from the thousands of scientists who have investigated the oceanography and biology of the Southern Ocean on ships from many nations as whale scientists, marine biologists and oceanographers. There is not much poetry I am aware of specifically on science and that is clear in the compiler’s choices which encompass Chris